IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 8, line 9, with the following amended paragraph:

--FIG. 1 shows a substrate bonding apparatus according to the first embodiment of the invention. The bonding apparatus comprises a chamber 1. The interior of the chamber 1 can be decompressed to a ~~give~~ given pressure of, e.g., about 1 Pa by a pressure reduction pump 2. A gate 4 is formed on one side of the chamber 1. It is closed airtightly by means of a shutter 3.—

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 11, line 16, with the following amended paragraph:

-- When the chamber 1 is decompressed inside, the second retaining table 11 is lowered so that the second substrate 16 on the table 11 is brought close to the first substrate 13 that is placed on the retaining surface 5a of the elastic sheet 7 of the first retaining table 5. In this state, images of positioning marks (not shown) that are formed on the substrates 13 and 16 are picked up by means of ~~a~~ an image-pickup camera (not shown), and an alignment operation is carried out. In the alignment operation, the first substrate 13 is driven in the X- and Y-directions so that the positioning marks are aligned.--

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 14, line 5, with the following amended paragraph:

-- The substrates were aligned with use of the elastic sheets having the Shore hardness shown in TABLE 1, and the influences of slippage of the substrates upon the positioning accuracy were examined. When the A-scale Shore hardness was not higher than 70, the substrates hardly slipped on the elastic sheet. When the A-scale Shore hardness was 90, the substrates were able to be positioned with a given accuracy by repeating the alignment operation, although they ~~somewhat~~ slipped somewhat. When the A-scale Shore hardness was 100, the substrates slipped so

much on the elastic sheet that the given positioning accuracy was not able to be obtained despite repeated alignment operation.--

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 19, line 15, with the following amended paragraph:

-- In this embodiment, seven second recesses 37 are formed in the closing plate 33. The respective tapped holes 41 of the second recesses 37 penetrate the closing plate 33 in its thickness direction and form second communication holes. Those pedestals 38 which are attached to the five second recesses 37 other than the two second recesses 37 that are situated at the longitudinally opposite end portions of the closing plate 33 are each formed having a first communication hole 43 ~~each~~. As shown in FIGS. 5 and 6, each hole 43 extends from the end face of the external thread 39, penetrates the retaining surface 5a that carries the elastic piece 7d thereon, and opens in the upper end face of the piece 7d. Thus, the chamber 31 communicates with the first communication hole 43 of the elastic piece 7d by means of the tapped hole 41.--

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 21, line 7, with the following amended paragraph:

-- Although the grooves 44 are formed in all of the elastic pieces 7d according to this embodiment, they may alternatively be formed in selected ones of the elastic pieces 7d only.--